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THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

126

Gurdjieff
Rennes: the Grand Masters
Bottesford witches
Voodoo in Brazil
What is genius?

Aus & NZ$1.75 SAR1.75 IR75p US$1.50

THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Published weekly by Orbis Publishing Limited
Orbis House, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

Volume 11 Issue 126

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Picture acknowledgements
Cover: Photri; Jean-Loup Charmet (inset); **2501:** Popperfoto; *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* by John Bennett (t); **2502:** *Gurdjieff & Mansfield* by James Moore; **2502–2503:** *Witness* by John Bennett; **2504:** John Cutten (c); *Witness* by John Bennett (b); **2505:** *Witness* by John Bennett; **2506:** Alan Hutchison Library/Carlos Freire; **2507:** UPI, New York (t and b); Guy Lyon Playfair (c); **2508:** Alan Hutchison Library (t); UPI, New York (b); **2509:** Alan Hutchison Library (t); UPI, New York (b); **2510:** National Portrait Gallery, London (tl and tr); **2510–2511:** Mary Evans Picture Library; **2511:** Jean-Loup Charmet (t); Drawing by Chas Addams; ©1979 New Yorker Magazine, Inc. (b); **2512–2513:** Mary Evans Picture Library; **2513:** National Portrait Gallery, London (t); Jean-Loup Charmet (b); **2514:** Michael Holford (tl); Scala (tr); **2514–2515:** Michael Baigent; **2516–2517:** Mary Evans Picture Library; **2518–2519:** Charles Walker; **2520:** Charles Walker (t); Mary Evans Picture Library (b); **back cover:** Alan Rush (t); GSW (ct and b); W. Henry (cb)

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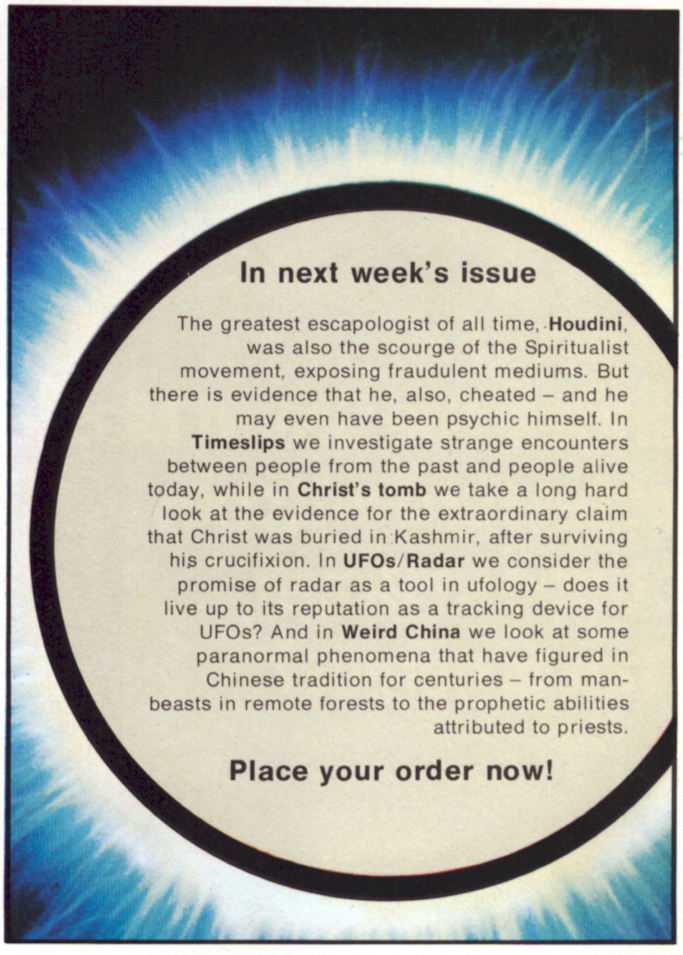

The Unexplained U.K. 60p. I.R. 75p. Aus. & N.Z. $1.75. S.A. R1.75. U.S.A. $1.50.
How to obtain copies of The Unexplained Copies are obtained by placing a regular order at your newsagent, or by taking out a subscription.
Subscription Rates
For six months (26 issues) £17.60, for one year (52 issues) £35.20. Send your order and remittance to The Unexplained Subscriptions, Punch Subscription Services, Watling Street, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK2 2BW, being sure to state the number of the first issue required.
Back numbers
U.K. & Eire: Back Nos are obtainable at cover price from your newsagent or from The Unexplained Back Nos. Orbis Publishing Ltd, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT – post free.
Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Europe & Malta: Back Nos are available at cover price from your newsagent. In case of difficulty write to the address in your country given for binders. South African readers should add sales tax.
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U.K. and Eire: Send a cheque/postal order for £3.25 per binder (incl. p & p) payable to Orbis Publishing Ltd to: The Unexplained Binders, Orbis House, 22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT. Please state the volume numbers required.
Australia: Binders are available through your local newsagent. In case of difficulty write to The Unexplained Binders, Gordon and Gotch (Aus) Ltd, 114 William Street, PO Box 767G, Melbourne, Vic. 3001.
New Zealand: Binders are available through your local newsagent or from The Unexplained Binders, Gordon and Gotch (NZ) Ltd, PO Box 1595, Wellington.
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Malta: Binders are obtainable by ordering from your local newsagent price £3.25. In case of difficulty write to The Unexplained Binders, Miller (Malta) Ltd, PO Box 272, 18a Scots Street, Valletta.

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Master of the sacred dance

In the early 1920s there appeared in Paris an obscure Armenian who claimed to be able to teach a method of realising mankind's inner potential. What, asks SHONA BURNS, was the nature of the secret he held?

Left: George Ivanovich Gurdjieff as a young man. Earning his living as a stage hypnotist, he travelled in search of 'a certain knowledge, of certain powers and possibilities exceeding the ordinary possibilities of man'. Having apparently found them – although, even to his closest disciples, he would never say where – he put this secret knowledge to use in inventing a philosophical system 'for the harmonious development of Man'. Gurdjieff founded his first institute for tuition in this system in Tiflis, Georgia (below), in 1919

ON 9 JANUARY 1923 the New Zealand writer Katherine Mansfield died at the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at Fontainebleau, near Paris. She had been fighting a losing battle with tuberculosis for several years. Disillusioned with conventional treatments, she had entered the institute some weeks before in the conviction that, by achieving a spiritual regeneration, she would also achieve a physical cure for her illness. She wrote to her estranged husband, John Middleton Murry, that she hoped to get 'really cured – not half cured, not cured in my body only and all the rest as ill as ever'. The institute had only recently been opened; the physical conditions of life there for a tuberculosis patient were hard – it was extremely cold, and all the residents had to follow a strenuous daily programme of physical work. Nevertheless, Katherine obviously found a great deal of solace in the few weeks she spent there. 'One has,' she wrote in a letter on 20 October 1922 – 10 weeks before her death – 'the feeling of having been in a wreck and by the mercy of Providence got ashore. . . . It's a real new life.'

The New Zealand writer Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923), who became a devotee of Gurdjieff's system through her friend A.R. Orage (below right), editor of the English literary journal *New Age*. Katherine Mansfield died peacefully of tuberculosis at Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at Fontainebleau, near Paris; 'One has,' she wrote some weeks before her death, 'the feeling of having been in a wreck and by the mercy of Providence got ashore. . . . It's a real new life'

Katherine's husband and friends were horrified that she had put herself in the hands of the dubious character who ran the institute. George Ivanovich Gurdjieff was an Armenian Russian who claimed to have acquired arcane knowledge during prolonged travels in the Middle and Far East. He had run study groups for 'the harmonious development of man' in the early years of the century in St Petersburg (now Leningrad) and Moscow, and was trying to establish his first formal institute in Tiflis when the Russian Revolution forced him to flee from Russia and take refuge in France. It was rumoured that a wealthy English Theosophist admirer had provided the funds to purchase the lovely house and grounds of the Prieuré at Fontainebleau, a former Carmelite monastery, where he set up his second institute. Gurdjieff at this time was aged about 50, a man of great vitality, who enjoyed good food and company – and was extremely attractive to women. One observer described him as 'altogether Eastern in appearance', with long black moustaches and piercing eyes; Katherine Mansfield said he looked 'exactly like a carpet dealer from the Tottenham Court Road'.

Gurdjieff's philosophical system, upon which his institute was based, proposed that ordinarily in mankind the physical, emotional and intellectual faculties (which Gurdjieff called 'centres') were unintegrated and out of balance, and Man therefore functioned inefficiently and mechanically. By following a programme of rigorous physical and psychological exercises, Gurdjieff's pupils hoped to develop their centres harmoniously, and eventually to make contact with a source of higher energy that would put them in possession of psychic powers not normally available to Man. As Gurdjieff said in a talk reported by his pupil C.S. Nott, 'directed' attention in which all three centres – physical, emotional and intellectual – take part is real concentration: then, 'a man can move a mountain.'

Although Katherine Mansfield died before she had an opportunity to advance in the Gurdjieff system, there is no doubt from her letters that she found peace and happiness in the last weeks of her life at the institute: 'I believe Mr Gurdjieff is the only person who can help me,' she wrote on 24 October 1922. 'It is a great happiness to be here. . . . Such beautiful understanding and sympathy I have never known in the outside world.'

Katherine had heard about Gurdjieff and his institute through her friend A.R. Orage, editor of the literary journal *New Age*. Orage became Gurdjieff's chief English disciple, and later ran a group of his own in New York.

Other well-known people became Gurdjieff followers during the 1920s and 1930s, including the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, and Dorothy Caruso, wife of the operatic singer Enrico Caruso.

How had Gurdjieff arrived at the remarkable philosophical 'system' that had such an influence during this period? It is not easy to determine the facts of his youth and formative years, partly because he himself was apt to give conflicting accounts of his early days to different disciples. It seems probable that he was born about 1872 in Armenia. His father was Greek, his mother Armenian, and he himself had Russian nationality. From an early age he was fascinated by the occult and magic. He told Peter

Ouspensky, his chief Russian disciple, how as a child he had come into contact with a group of 'Devil worshippers', the Yezidis; he had observed how a Yezidi boy would find it impossible to step out of a circle traced around him on the ground by another Devil worshipper.

According to Ouspensky's account in his book *In search of the miraculous* (1950), Gurdjieff gradually became convinced 'of the existence of a certain knowledge, of certain powers and possibilities exceeding the ordinary possibilities of man, and of people possessing clairvoyance and other miraculous powers'. While still in his teens he started to travel with the definite intention of finding this knowledge. Ouspensky and his other disciples were convinced that he did find it, but where he found it Gurdjieff would never say. Even to Ouspensky he was vague: he mentioned 'Tibetan monasteries, the Chitral, Mount Athos; Sufi schools in Persia, in Bokhara, and eastern Turkestan; he mentioned dervishes of various orders, but all of them in a very indefinite way.'

Left: disciples of Gurdjieff perform one of his sacred dances; at the left of the front row is Madame Ogilvanna Lloyd Wright, wife of the renowned American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Learning the movements, which were understood to be derived from Dervish dances (below), constituted a physical discipline that was designed to give the participants a superhuman control over their faculties

According to John Bennett's account in *Gurdjieff: a very great enigma* (1963) Gurdjieff became convinced that the Caucasus, where he was born, was still the repository of some ancient secret wisdom, possibly going back 4000 years. He embarked on a 20-year quest for this esoteric knowledge, during the course of which he allegedly discovered 'practical and powerful methods for man to produce and control the fine substances' needed to produce psychic and spiritual changes in himself.

How Gurdjieff supported himself during these prolonged travels is not clear. He may have traded in oriental carpets, as he did later in life. Suggestions have also been made that he worked as a Russian spy. Towards the end of his travels, he had acquired sufficient proficiency in the practice of hypnosis and auto-suggestion to be able to earn a living as miracle-worker or healer.

Powerful charisma

Eventually Gurdjieff returned to Russia and set up practical groups to work at his 'system' in St Petersburg and Moscow. It was in Moscow, in 1915, that Ouspensky first met him, in a back-street café:

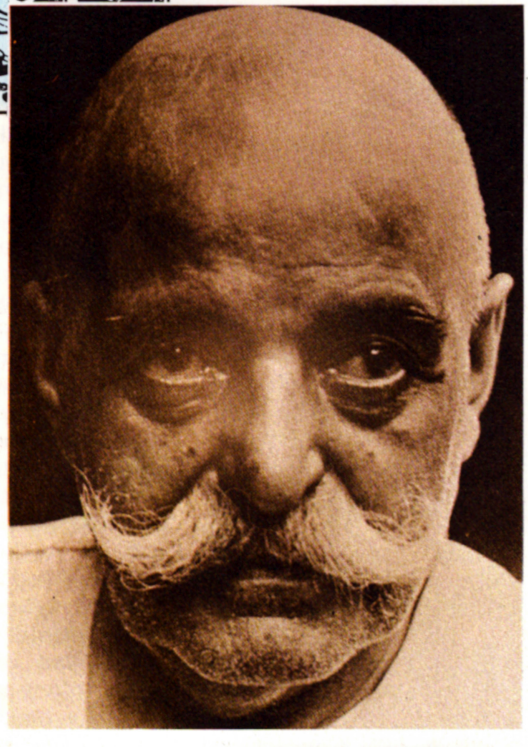
> I saw a man of an oriental type, no longer young, with a black mustache and piercing eyes, who astonished me first of all because he seemed to be disguised and completely out of keeping with the place and its atmosphere.

He wore a black overcoat with a velvet collar and a black bowler hat; he spoke Russian incorrectly with a strong Caucasian accent – which was also apparently the way he spoke English. Ouspensky visited Gurdjieff's apartment on the Bolshaia Dmitrovka, which was furnished in Eastern style with the floors and walls covered in carpets and the ceilings hung with silk shawls; it had a special atmosphere, and pupils who visited Gurdjieff would often sit down and simply remain silent for hours. But chance visitors would react to this atmosphere by starting to talk non-stop 'as if they were afraid of . . . feeling something'. Ouspensky said that another special quality of the apartment was that it 'was not possible to tell lies there'.

The prospectus of Gurdjieff's institute, which he opened first in Tiflis in Georgia in 1919, offered as subjects for study 'gymnastics of all kinds (rhythmical, medicinal, and others); exercises for the development of will, memory, attention, hearing, thinking, emotion, instinct, and so on'. It made no mention, however, of the sacred dances or the breathing exercises that formed an essential part of Gurdjieff's system.

The memoirs of many of Gurdjieff's pupils suggest that they endured the rigorous discipline he imposed in the hope of achieving some kind of breakthrough into a state of higher consciousness that would bring with

Left: design for the 1923 programme of Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, showing the fruitful co-operation of opposing elements of life – art and music, science and technology – symbolised by an angel and a demon



Right: Gurdjieff in later life. Everyone who met him was aware of his personal magnetism and the immense vitality that he was apparently able to impart to others. Some, however, found his appearance unprepossessing; Katherine Mansfield, for instance, described him as looking 'exactly like a carpet dealer from the Tottenham Court Road'

Below right: Peter Ouspensky, Gurdjieff's chief Russian disciple. Ouspensky left Gurdjieff in 1924 to found a similar but distinct movement

it extraordinary psychic powers. It became clear to his more advanced pupils that Gurdjieff had not set up his working groups out of altruism, to benefit mankind, but to satisfy his own inner needs. In the course of his 20-year search, he had become convinced that esoteric knowledge was not enough. He needed to increase his knowledge of practical psychology, and for this he needed subjects to study at first hand. Early in his career, his healing work with drug and alcohol addicts gave him his opportunity; in his book *The herald of coming good* (1934), he said that he became a healer of vices both to give 'conscientious aid to sufferers' and 'for the sake of my investigations'. His work with groups of his adherents in Russia and France gave him a continuing opportunity to develop his knowledge of the human psyche. C.S. Nott

relates in his book *Further teachings of Gurdjieff* (1969) how he met Gurdjieff in Paris at the Café de la Paix, and complained bitterly that Gurdjieff had brought himself and another disciple, Orage, so far – and then left them 'seemingly in the air'. Gurdjieff listened quietly – and then said, with a sardonic grin, 'I needed rats for my experiments.'

A large part of the system was taken up with practising and performing the sacred dances that Gurdjieff was understood to have learned in a Dervish monastery. Groups of otherwise inexperienced dancers were trained by Gurdjieff, and public performances were given on several occasions in Paris, London and New York. Gurdjieff maintained that the dances embodied esoteric meanings that would be apparent to the initiated: 'In the strictly defined movements and combinations of the dancers, certain laws are visually reproduced which are intelligible to those who know them.'

However, for the individual dancers, the task of mastering the difficult movements was itself a physical discipline that was to enable them to acquire superhuman control over their faculties.

To the uninitiated observer, the dances certainly did not come over as a language expressing knowledge of a higher order. At a public demonstration in New York in 1924, William Seabrook recorded his main impression of 'the amazing, brilliant, automaton-like, inhuman, almost incredible docility and robot-like obedience of the disciples. . . . They were like a group of perfectly trained zombies.' Seabrook went on to write, in his book *Witchcraft, its power in the world today* (1942), that the main purpose of the demonstration seemed to be to show how Gurdjieff had taught his pupils 'supernormal powers of physical control, coordination, relaxation', and so on, without which they would certainly have broken limbs.

Charlatan or wonder-worker?

In spite of the scoffers, who described Gurdjieff variously as the 'Greek charlatan', 'the Armenian magic master' and the 'Caucasian wonder-worker', Gurdjieff's pupils remained convinced that he was a genuine mage, in possession of occult knowledge and special powers. Orage called him 'a kind of walking god', and he seems to have had some kind of psychic energy that he was able, on occasions, to transmit directly to his pupils. John Bennett reports in his autobiography *Witness* (1975) an incident that happened while he was resident at the Prieuré. He woke one morning feeling ill, but nevertheless, driven by some 'superior will', he got up as usual and performed his day's programme of physical work, including Gurdjieff's strenuous dancing class in the afternoon. During the latter Bennett felt himself growing weaker and weaker. He felt Gurdjieff's eyes upon him, willing him to continue. Suddenly, he felt 'an influx of

Further reading

G. I. Gurdjieff, *Meetings with remarkable men*, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1963
C. S. Nott, *Further teachings of Gurdjieff*, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1969
P. D. Ouspensky, *In search of the miraculous*, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1969
Fritz Peters, *Gurdjieff*, Wildwood House 1976

The interment of Gurdjieff at Fontainebleau in November 1949. His disciples stood vigil over his body for several days before its burial; one of them commented that 'strong vibrations filled the place' and there were apparently 'emanations or radiations from the corpse itself'

immense power': his body seemed 'to have turned into light'.

Gurdjieff later told Bennett that what he called 'higher emotional energy' was necessary to develop oneself. Some rare people in the world, he said, are connected to a 'great accumulator' of this energy, and can transmit it to others. Gurdjieff implied that he himself was one of these people.

Fasting and telepathy

Gurdjieff was credited by many with telepathic powers. Ouspensky relates a curious experience in 1916 when he was staying with Gurdjieff in a house in Finland. Ouspensky had been going through an intensive period of exercises that included fasting and special breathing exercises, and he claimed to have experienced mystical states – states that he was, however, unable to describe. While sitting in a small room with Gurdjieff and two other people, Ouspensky began to 'hear his thoughts'. Gurdjieff was talking to Ouspensky telepathically:

> I heard his voice inside me as it were in the chest near the heart. He put a definite question to me. I looked at him; he was sitting and smiling. His question provoked in me a very strong emotion.

Ouspensky went to bed. But the telepathic conversation continued during the night, with Ouspensky now able to send telepathic messages to Gurdjieff. This strange communication between them continued for several days.

Music played an important part in Gurdjieff's system. Gurdjieff himself wrote the music for his sacred dances, based on what he could remember of the music he had heard in the Dervish monastery. He played his own melodies on a small hand organ, and several pupils testified to the psychic healing powers of the music. C.S. Nott recalled how he visited Gurdjieff in great distress after a severe, crippling accident to his young son. Gurdjieff took Nott into his sitting room, took up his hand harmonium, 'and began to play a simple melody with strange harmonies, repeating and repeating yet all the time with different combinations of notes'. Nott felt that Gurdjieff was conveying something to him through the music, and also through the 'telepathic means he knew so well'. A feeling of hope began to replace his 'dark depression'.

Gurdjieff died in Paris on 29 October 1949. His pupils kept vigil over his body for several days while it lay in the chapel at the American hospital, and C.S. Nott reported that 'strong vibrations filled the place' and there seemed to be 'emanations or radiations from the corpse itself'. After Gurdjieff's death some groups continued to follow his 'system' in France, the United States and England. One of these was run by John Bennett at his house at Coombe Springs, outside London. Bennett claimed to have been close to Gurdjieff in the last months of his life, and recalls that Gurdjieff often referred 'to his own imminent departure from this world and to the coming of another who would complete the work he had started'. He also indicated that a teacher was already preparing himself 'a long way from here' in the Far East.

In apparent fulfilment of this prediction, the Coombe Springs group abandoned the Gurdjieff system in 1957 and embraced a new philosophy – from Indonesia.

Drumming up the spirits

Although Catholicism is nominally the prevailing religion of Brazil, the sophisticated, Westernised life-style of the people is interwoven, as FRANCIS KING relates, with pagan and magical elements of ancient spirit religions

A massive statue of Christ (left) towers over Rio de Janeiro, a reminder that Brazil's official religion is Catholicism. Yet many of the country's inhabitants also adhere to the beliefs of Macumba, the Brazilian form of voodoo. Rio's Copacabana beach (below) is both a pleasure resort and the scene of many Macumba rites, such as the one shown here in honour of the African sea goddess Yemanja

BRAZIL HAS A POPULATION of around 95 million and is often described as the world's largest Catholic country. Nominally this is true: almost every child born in the country is baptised, and most Brazilians receive the last rites of the Church when they are mortally ill and, after death, a full Catholic funeral. But while the Catholic churches and cathedrals are often crowded, the voodoo temples of Candomblé, Umbanda and other Afro-American spirit religions (which in Brazil are collectively referred to as Macumba) are more crowded still.

The practice of Macumba rituals is widespread throughout the country and does not take place only inside temples. Macumba ceremonies can be, and are, performed in isolated clearings in the the Amazonian jungle, at crossroads (traditionally, as in Europe, popular places for magic rites), and even on Rio de Janeiro's famous Copacabana beach, which is one of the world's most popular pleasure spots.

This dual role of Copacabana beach aptly illustrates the powerful hold Afro-American religion and magic have on Brazilian life. By day the beach is packed with sunbathing tourists; by night it is thronged with Macumbistas worshipping a host of exotic gods and demons, and casting spells designed to obtain love, money or power, or even the death of an enemy.

On New Year's Eve Copacabana is the site of a major Macumba festival combining secular, religious and magical elements, at

which the gods of pagan Africa are worshipped, together with the Catholic saints with whom they are identified. The principal object of adoration however is the African sea goddess Yemanja, who is often identified with the Virgin Mary.

Yemanja was brought to Brazil by Yoruba slaves from the area of Africa that is now Nigeria. In Yoruba mythology Yemanja was the daughter of heaven and earth. She married her brother, and then coupled with her son, who fathered on her a whole tribe of gods and goddesses, among them Shango, the god of storm and thunder (identified by Macumbistas with St John the Baptist), Ogun, the god of war and ironworking, and Orishako, a peasant god who rules over agriculture and female fertility. The name Yemanja is derived from the Yoruba words for 'mother' and 'fish'; she is the 'mother of all fish' and therefore queen of the ocean and everything under and upon it. For this reason her chief festival is held on the seashore, and the offerings dedicated to her are given to the sea.

As sunset approaches on 31 December Macumbistas make their way individually or in small groups to Copacabana beach. Some come on foot, some in cars (many of Macumba's devotees belong to the prosperous middle classes). And since the New Year's Eve festival is of national significance many more come in motor coaches from temples hundreds of miles away.

The worshippers are mostly dressed in white – Yemanja's favourite colour – and they carry candles and gifts to be offered to the goddess. Each devotee places lighted candles in a previously dug hole carefully walled with sand as a protection against the wind. The offerings, which may be mirrors, bottles of scent, hair ribbons or, in the case of prosperous businessmen, expensive bottles of imported Bourbon, are placed near by.

Top: at night on Copacabana beach a priestess dedicates flowers, clothing and other items to Yemanja before consigning them to the waves

Above: David St Clair, who was the victim of 'closing the paths', a technique of Quimbanda black magic

Left: at the *Saida dos Santos* ceremony, which celebrates the 'leaving of the saints', a dancer in rich ceremonial robes represents the voodoo deity Oxum

Each devotee then looks fixedly into the flames of the flickering candles and asks Yemanja for some favour. The more candles there are, the better; it seems that either Yemanja likes the smell of burning wax, or she wants her worshippers to spend as much money as possible to show their devotion. Whether the number of candles offered is odd or even is important. If the devotee wants some material benefit, such as a wage increase or a new car, he must burn an even number of candles; for something to do with the emotions, such as a love affair or a better relationship with one's neighbours, the number must be odd. If the candles burn to extinction or are swept out to sea by the incoming tide, it is a sign the wish will be granted. If however they are blown out by the wind, the omen is unfavourable.

As the myriads of candles are lit the Macumba drums start to sound, and the dancing begins. At first only a few people dance, rather mechanically, as if performing a necessary but boring duty. As the evening wears on the numbers increase, and a frenzied, almost orgiastic, quality becomes apparent. Eventually, as in the voodoo celebrations of Haiti, some of the dancers enter a trance state and become possessed – the gods descend and 'mount their horses'.

As in Haiti those who are possessed seem to lose all consciousness of their own identity, and when they return to normal consciousness cannot remember what happened during the trance state. Out of the great number of dancers on the beach only a few will achieve the trance state; nevertheless it is possible for the interested onlooker to move through the crowds and meet many members of the Macumba pantheon, such as the god of war, the god of thunder, 'the Old Black Slave' (a supernatural being renowned for

his powers of healing) or Exu, a sinister entity who is the nearest Macumba equivalent to Satan.

In due time the tide sweeps away Yemanja's gifts, the entranced dancers return to normal consciousness, the worshippers make their way homewards and the festival is over for another year.

The New Year's Eve festival at Copacabana is no mere anachronistic survival from a past age of slavery and superstition. Belief in the existence of the spirit world is alive and well at every level of Brazilian society. Peasants, factory hands, bankers and politicians almost all believe in gods, demons and supernatural powers, even if they are not prepared to admit it to sceptical foreigners. This widespread acceptance of the supernatural would seem to extend even to such a prosaic institution as the Brazilian Post Office. In 1957 and 1964 it issued pictorial stamps in honour of *The spirits' book* and *The gospel according to Spiritism*, both works by Allan Kardec, the founding father and first theoretician of Spiritism (see page 518).

Kardec's Spiritism differs from Spiritualism in that it incorporates a belief in reincarnation. Its influence on Macumba varies from group to group. Some temples conduct ceremonies that are almost completely 'Kardecised'. When the devotees are in a state of trance they follow a Europeanised pattern of behaviour and their actions are quite as restrained and unalarming as those of any French or English Spiritualist medium. In other temples less influenced by Kardec, those possessed by the gods engage in remarkable and spectacular activities that are seen by the onlookers as evidence of genuine control by otherworldly beings. Such activities include walking on broken bottles, inserting large needles into the cheeks, fire eating, and drinking whole bottles of raw cane spirit within the space of a few minutes, all apparently without any untoward effect.

Above: Brazilian Macumba ceremonies are folk rituals in which all present participate to some degree; here, at the climax of a festival, the dancers prostrate themselves

Below: a young girl dances in a trance to rhythmic hand-clapping and the music of simple instruments

Manifestations of this kind are not as uncontrolled as they may appear. Macumba ceremonies follow a pattern that is quite as predictable, in terms of its own conventions, as any Christian service. Stylised drum rhythms, dancing, a charged atmosphere of religious expectation, and the practice of deliberate over-breathing (which produces changes in brain chemistry) induce a near-hypnotic state in all the participants. When the high priestess calls the gods down the dancers stop moving one by one. Some bend down, and then straighten up, often with a scream, in a trance, possessed by a divinity.

'Closing the paths'

As in Haiti, so in Brazil there is a darker side to spirit religion. This is Quimbanda, an evil voodoo whose practitioners work black magic against their own and, for a fee, their clients' enemies. A favourite technique of Quimbanda is 'closing the paths'. This involves casting a spell that blocks the victim's progress to personal happiness. The person who has been subjected to this finds that love and financial matters cause nothing but trouble, that their physical and mental health deteriorate, and that problems arise in even the most ordinary everyday affairs.

The American writer David St Clair seems to have been the victim of such a psychic attack during the time he lived in Brazil. His girlfriend left him, money he was expecting did not arrive, legal difficulties arose over an inheritance, and he contracted malaria. He attributed his misfortune to

Right: votive offerings to a deity to effect a cure. The image itself (such as the feet and breast in the foreground), or a mark on the image, indicates the part of the body that needs to be healed

Further reading

Maya Deren, *Divine horsemen: the living gods of Haiti*, Thames and Hudson 1953
Alfred Métraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, Andre Deutsch 1959
David St Clair, *Drum and candle*, Macdonald 1972

nothing more sinister than bad luck; until a Brazilian friend, a Macumbista who claimed to have psychic powers, told him that 'his paths had been closed' by Quimbanda.

At first St Clair thought this was superstitious nonsense. Soon afterwards, however, he received a message from a Spiritualist source: his maid, a woman named Edna, had employed black magic against him. Each week, it was alleged, she took a used item of his clothing to a Quimbanda ceremony; there it was buried while 'crossing spells' were chanted and ceremonial candles burned around it. In addition to this, said the Spiritualist, Edna was adding a magical 'closing powder' to his food. St Clair was still sceptical, but he had seen too many strange things in Brazil to discount completely the idea that black magic was being used against him. He decided to fight fire with fire, and to attend a Macumba ceremony himself and consult one of the possessed.

Rituals and dances often take place at night and can last for hours. Here fatigue is evident on the faces of the followers who urge on the dancers with their rhythmic clapping

The first part of the ceremony he attended followed the conventional pattern of drumming, dancing and possession.

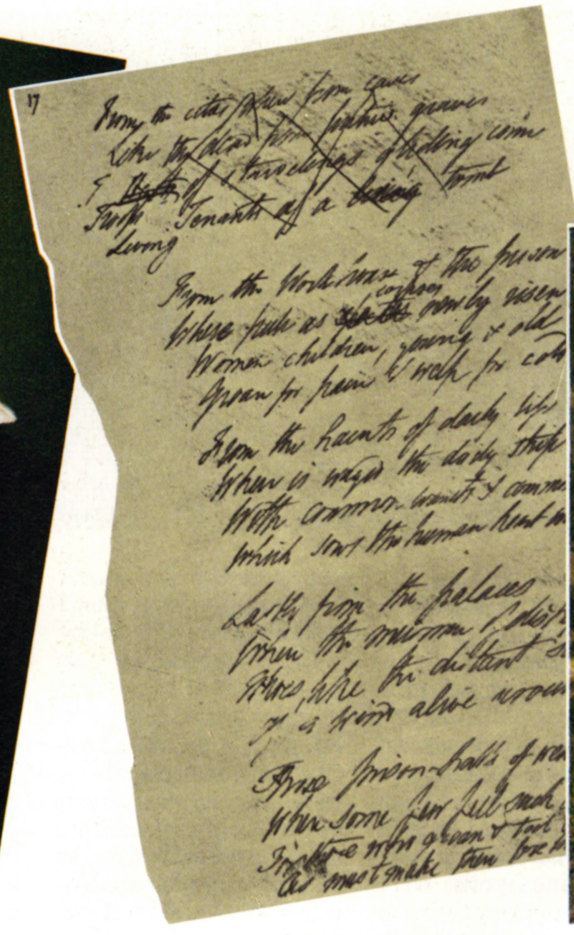
But then something extraordinary happened. The priestess, who was wearing the customary Macumba vestments and regalia – a spotlessly white blouse and skirt with a gold cross at her breast – suddenly left the temple. When she returned a few minutes later her appearance was completely different. She was clad in filthy red satin tatters; in place of the golden cross was the skull of a human infant, its jaws tied together with black tape, a dead snake wreathed between the staring eye sockets.

Laughing insanely, the priestess seized a bottle of rum, gulped half of it down, and announced that she was Exu, the Macumba equivalent of Satan.

A long conversation ensued between St Clair, 'Exu' and two mediums, one of whom was possessed by 'Satan's dog'. Eventually Exu, who claimed he sometimes did good as well as evil, told St Clair, 'The curse has been lifted, and will come down doubly on the person who placed it on you.'

Within a few days 'the paths opened' for St Clair. His psychological attitude changed for the better and, perhaps because he no longer expected the worst, his health, finances and love-life all improved. Possession of a priestess by a voodoo deity had transformed his outlook on life.

This perhaps is the real power of voodoo, Macumba and other Afro-American spirit religions. It is possible that possession by the gods offers the devotee something of greater therapeutic value to a diseased psyche than do orthodox Western remedies.



The genius within

How are works of genius produced? Their creators can rarely say; but time and again, as ARCHIE ROY explains, they insist that the credit is not theirs – they are merely instruments of a power they cannot command

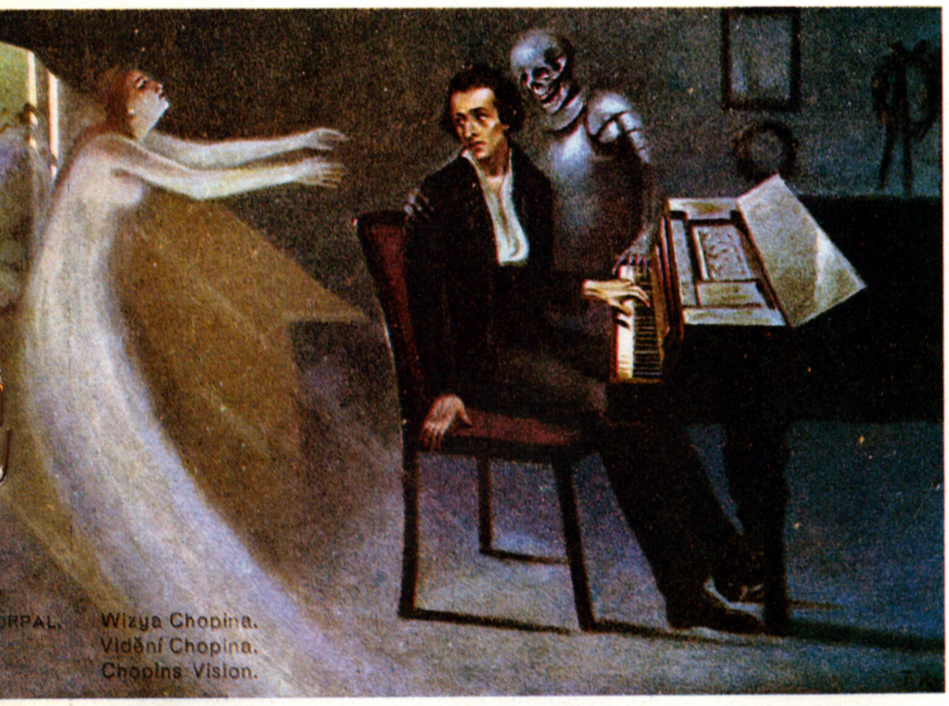
GENIUSES ARE OFTEN thought of as eccentric, abnormal, neighbours to the mad. The stock figure of the demented scientist still stalks horror movies, threatening the world with the latest product of an inspired but twisted thinking.

This popular picture may not be a true one, but genius is indeed strange and mysterious. Who can explain the masterpieces of art and literature, music, science and technology, philosophy and other creative spheres that have enriched human history – and sometimes changed it? What inspires the greatest creative minds?

While exceptional men and women have laboured, others have studied them and recorded their accounts of how they received their inspiration. Through such accounts runs a strange common thread: men and women of genius frequently ascribe their remarkable achievements to sources outside themselves. In case after case they claim that their discoveries, their poems, their music

Inspiration was impassioned and unpredictable for Percy Shelley (above left). The manuscript of his poem *The mask of anarchy* (above) shows the heavy revisions he made as ideas flooded forth

Robert Burns (right) was referring to the ancient idea that artistic creation occurred at the touch of a Muse when he wrote: 'The poetic Genius of my Country found me . . . at the plough, and threw her inspiring mantle over me.' Cartoonist Charles Addams of the *New Yorker* magazine made lighter use of the notion (far right)



Above: the popular image of the Muse, in a sentimental painting. She makes a last appearance to Chopin, as death embraces him

Left: William Wordsworth wrote of poetic inspiration as an 'awful Power . . . from the mind's abyss.' Is this an accurate picture of the creative faculty?

are *given* to them. One even gets the impression that their great works have been thrust upon them and that they themselves are mere instruments of some unknown creator. This notion is best considered by way of example.

The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley was found one day by his friend Edward John Trelawny among the pine forests near Pisa, Italy, sheets of manuscript lying beside him. Trelawny relates how scrawled the words were; many were scored out, corrected again and again in the heat of the poet's almost despairing effort to set down the images and words that came boiling up into his mind. 'Poetry,' Shelley said in explanation, 'is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say: "I will write poetry." The greatest poet even cannot say it.'

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe claimed that the songs he wrote made him, not he the songs.

William Wordsworth, widely acknowledged as a poet of genius, was capable of examining his own mind in the throes of composition. On many occasions in his poetry he spoke of the 'sublime invasion' of material. In one place he writes:

> That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss,
> Like an unfathomed vapour that enwraps,
> At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost;
> Halted without an effort to break through;
> But to my conscious soul I now can say –
> 'I recognise thy glory'; in such strength
> Of usurpation, when the light of sense
> Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
> The invisible world, doth greatness make abode.

The psychical researcher F.W.H. Myers put it like this: 'The influence rises from no discoverable source; for a moment it may startle or bewilder the conscious mind; then it is recognised as a source of knowledge, arriving through inner vision; while the action of the senses is suspended in a kind of momentary trance.'

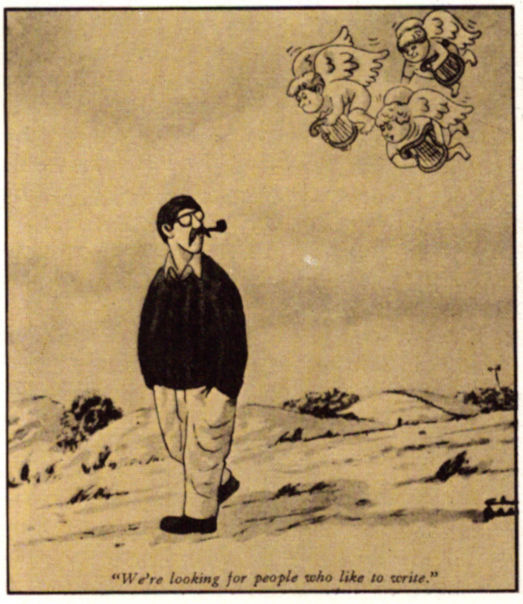
George Eliot, the novelist, believed that when she was producing her most inspired work, some other personality seemed to take possession of her, dictating as if to a secretary. George Sand, the French writer, believed the same thing in regard to her own work. She has also left an account of the kind of creative struggle the composer Frédéric Chopin – her lover – went through to put down on paper the themes that had come to him. She wrote that his labour

> was a series of efforts, of irresolutions, and of frettings to seize again certain details of the theme he had heard. [He would] shut himself up in his room for whole days, weeping, walking, breaking his pens, repeating and altering a bar a hundred times!

Some famous authors have even talked about demons or brownies as the originators of their work. Rudyard Kipling said that he had learned to trust his personal 'demon' for advice, and William Thackeray wrote: 'I have been surprised at the observations made by some of my characters. It seems as if an occult Power was moving the pen.'

Robert Louis Stevenson obtained much of his most brilliant material from dreams, one of which was his well-known short story *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. In it he shows a realisation of the dark and sinister forces that can rule the subconscious. Talking about the role of his 'brownies' in his great literary output he said:

> The more I think of it, the more I am moved to press upon the world my



Verse and worse

Geniuses usually have an unshakeable conviction of the value of their work; unfortunately, such conviction is no guarantee of its merits in the eyes of posterity. William McGonagall (1830–1902) was certain he composed his verses under 'divine inspiration'; and perhaps he did – if there is a god of bathos. One day he felt 'a strange kind of feeling' stealing over him – and then he penned his first verses, a tribute to his friend the Rev. George Gilfillan:

My blessing on his noble form,
And on his lofty head,
May all good angels guard him
while living,
And hereafter when he's dead.

Faithfully Yours
William McGonagall
poet and Tragedian.

Deaths among the clergy were a favourite theme of McGonagall's:

Friends of humanity, of high and
low degree,
I pray ye all come listen to me;
And truly I will relate to ye
The tragic fate of the Rev.
Alexander Heriot Mackonochie

Who was on a visit to the Bishop
of Argyle
For the good of his health, for a
short while;
Because for the last three years his
memory had been affected
Which prevented him from getting
his thoughts collected.

Stephen Pile puts it aptly when he says McGonagall 'was so giftedly bad that he backed unwittingly into genius'.

question: 'Who are the Little People?' They are near connections of the dreamer's, beyond doubt; they share in his financial worries and have an eye to the bank-book; they share also in his training; . . . only I think they have more talent; and one thing is beyond doubt, they can tell him a story piece by piece, like a serial, and keep him all the while in ignorance of where they aim.

That part of my work which is done while I am sleeping is the Brownies' part beyond contention; but that which is done while I am up and about is by no means necessarily mine, since all goes to show the Brownies have a hand in it even then.

Socrates, one of the greatest thinkers of all time, was often guided and advised in his affairs by a monitory voice, called variously the 'divine sign', 'divine voice', or the demon. He claimed that on many occasions it warned him against certain courses of action he proposed to take, and he believed that it was always right. It is an oddity of this mystical guide that it suggested only what not to do, never what the philosopher ought to do. Socrates seemed to feel that he was making the right decisions himself when the voice was silent. During the last days of his life, when his accusers sought his death, he drew strength and comfort from the fact that the voice intervened once only; this was to advise him against preparing a speech in his own defence.

Few would dispute that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – who wrote a complicated piano concerto at the age of four – was the greatest musical genius of all time. As far as we know, the creative power that activated artists such as Rembrandt and Mozart's younger contemporary Beethoven had to be developed, the latent spark fanned laboriously into flame. Mozart's genius was simply there, full blown. He himself had a simple explanation for his remarkable talents: he was in his own mind a 'receptor', an instrument through which some unknown power channelled glorious music.

Great scientists have also acknowledged help from an indefinable source of inspiration. Friedrich August Kekulé, the father of structural organic chemistry, was one such. After fruitless struggles to determine the nature of the benzene molecule, he had a waking dream while travelling on a London bus. In the dream he saw the atoms grouping themselves in snake-like patterns in space. It was the breakthrough to the solution of his problem (see page 546).

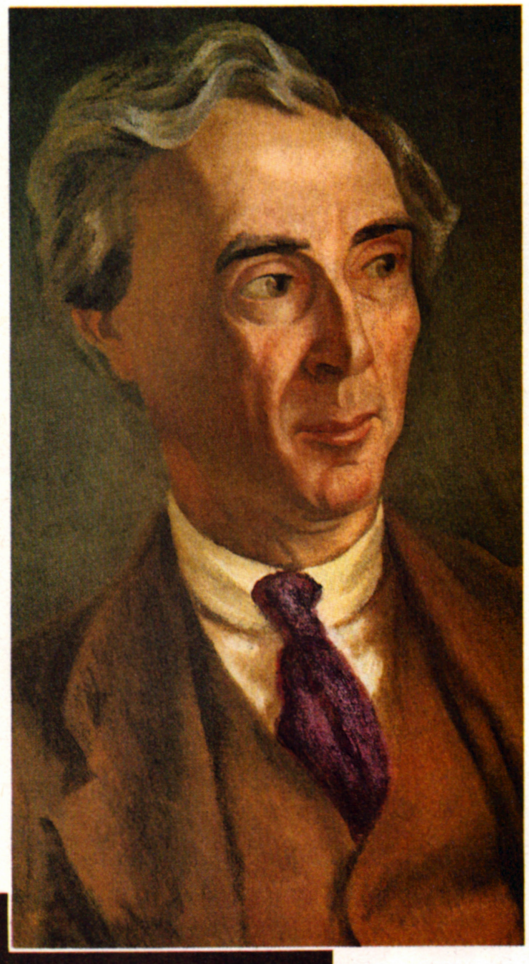
Bertrand Russell said of his mathematical creativity: 'Every evening [my mathematical] discussion ended with some difficulty and every morning I found that the difficulty of the previous evening had solved itself as I slept.'

Lord Kelvin had a marked intuitive gift. Solutions came to him in a flash of inspiration – and afterwards he had to labour consciously and exhaustively for proofs. Einstein too 'saw' solutions to his problems.

Player on the other side

There are in fact far too many cases of geniuses claiming that their works are in some way given to them, and that they simply polish them up, for us to ignore the possibility that in some strange way they are approaching the truth. However they put it, whether by referring to 'brownies' or 'demons' or 'subconscious mechanisms', for such people there seems to be a player or players on the other side of the boundary to consciousness – inspiring, teaching, guiding, desirous of helping them in their creative struggles. In these terms, the word 'genius' is most aptly applied to those human beings who, upon the penetration of their consciousnesses by inspiration when the barriers are down, have conscious abilities with

Below: Lord Kelvin made many brilliant discoveries concerning electricity and heat. Often they came to him in an instant: hours of laborious work were then needed to prove the results in a rigorous way



Left: Bertrand Russell was one of the many creative thinkers who find that, after lengthy and fruitless work on baffling problems, solutions are likely to come, fully formed, during the hours of sleep

Below right: the 'demon' of Socrates spoke to him for the last time while he was in prison, on trial for his life. It advised him not to write a speech in his own defence

which to mould what they have been given into forms that win widespread recognition and admiration.

There are many cases in which the source of inspiration seems to take advantage of the greater receptiveness of the inspired when he or she is asleep or coming out of sleep.

Professor William A. Lamberton of the University of Pennsylvania, in the USA, was trying to solve a problem in descriptive geometry. After battling with it for almost two weeks, he deliberately put it aside. For the next week he occupied his mind with totally different matters – and then the desired solution was given to him in the strangest manner.

He woke one morning to see a geometrical figure apparently drawn on the north wall of his room, which had once been a classroom and which still had traces of a blackboard visible under the white paint on that wall. The hallucination not only took the form of a geometrical statement of the problem but also incorporated the auxiliary lines that demonstrated the solution. Professor Lamberton sprang from his bed and drew the figure on paper. 'Needless to say,' he wrote afterwards, 'the geometrical solution being thus given, only a few minutes were needed to get the analytical one.'

It is clear from the examples given that in most cases geniuses have to do the spadework themselves; that is, their conscious self has to sweat over the material both before and after the player on the other side intervenes. To that extent there is truth in the saying that genius is 10 per cent inspiration and 90 per cent perspiration.

But where, if that is the correct word, does the source of inspiration lie? No definite answer can be given, but there are many clues leading to a tentative 'model' of genius.

It must be accepted that our conscious personality is little more than a fraction of the human psyche or personality, and that most of that psyche is outside consciousness. F.W.H. Myers called those other reaches of personality the subliminal – that is to say, the parts below the threshold of consciousness. A limited definition of the subliminal or unconscious is that it contains everything, including our memories, that is not held within consciousness. But, as Myers, William James, Carl Gustav Jung, and indeed all those who have truly appreciated the complexity of human personality, have taught, the subliminal is much more than that. It merges with what Jung called a collective unconscious (see page 895), which is influenced by all men and women and which, by its structure and drives, in turn influences them. The evidence that a person's personality, both conscious and unconscious, is not a closed system is provided by telepathy, clairvoyance, and such ostensible cases of possession as those seen in the trance states of mediums. The inspiration of genius can be seen as but another piece of evidence for the existence of this great uncharted psychic continent that, for its own purposes, acts towards Man as the player on the other side.

It has been suggested that there exists in France a secret society that guards the lineal descendants of Christ. Furthermore, the leaders of this society include some of the most illustrious names in history. BRIAN INNES **reports**

Names to conjure with

THE FRENCH ADORE A CONSPIRACY. Hundreds of books have been published in France that set out to prove that the Knights Templar were not wiped out between 1307 and 1314, that secret societies claiming access to an 'esoteric tradition' derived from the Templars have played a significant part in political developments throughout Europe since that date – that, indeed, they were behind the French Revolution, on one side or the other, depending upon the individual author's predilections. In 1974 J.M. Roberts devoted a book of nearly 500 pages to *The mythology of the secret societies*, and demonstrated that there was no evidence for this belief; but still the books proliferate.

There is some firm evidence that the Order of the Prieuré de Sion existed at some time in the past. After Jerusalem fell to Godfroi de Bouillon in 1099, an abbey devoted to Nôtre Dame du Mont de Sion was built on the hill of Sion to the south of Jerusalem; it is referred to in later documents and figures in views of the city. A certain Father Vincent, writing in 1698, says: 'There were in Jerusalem during the Crusades . . . knights attached to the Abbey of Nôtre Dame de Sion who took the name of Chevaliers de l'Ordre de Nôtre Dame de Sion.' And R. Röhricht, in his *Regesta regni Hierosolymitani* ('Roll of the kings of Jerusalem') of 1893, cites two charters: one of 1116 by Arnaldus, prior of Nôtre Dame de Sion, and one of 1125, in which Arnaldus's name appears with that of Hugues Payen, the first Grand Master of the Temple. The existence of the Abbey of Sion up till 1281 is attested to by E.-G. Rey in a paper in the proceedings of the French National Society of Antiquaries (1887), which lists the abbots who administered the abbey's property in Palestine.

But these are the only historical documents referred to by Henry Lincoln, Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh in *The holy blood and the Holy Grail*; all other material appears to come from what they call 'the Prieuré documents', those mysterious duplicated pamphlets that have been lodged with the Bibliothèque Nationale since 1965.

The *Dossiers secrets*, allegedly by one Henri Lobineau (see page 2495), contain three lists of names. The first reproduces Rey's list (with two insignificant additions); the second is taken by Lincoln, Leigh and Baigent as proof of the authenticity of the third. It is a list of the Grand Masters of the Knights Templar between 1118 and 1190. It differs in certain respects from those given by most historians. The authors of *The holy blood and the Holy Grail* write: 'We spent more than a year' – but it must be borne in mind that during this time they were also

Far left: *The Deposition*, by Botticelli (1444/5–1510). Christ's body, newly taken down from the cross, lies in the arms of his sorrowing mother, while Mary Magdalene passionately embraces his head. A theory has been put forward that Christ was married to Mary Magdalene, and that the interests of their descendants, who live in France, are guarded by a powerful and secret society called the Prieuré de Sion. Intriguingly Botticelli (left), who chose to depict Mary Magdalene's grief so movingly, was allegedly himself a Grand Master of the Prieuré de Sion, from 1483 to 1510

Below: a 15th-century Dutch print of a perspective of Jerusalem, showing the Temple and the Abbey of Nôtre Dame de Sion (top left, marked 'Mons Syon'). The coincidence of names, as well as some documentary evidence, suggests that the abbey may once have been the home of the Prieuré de Sion

engaged on a number of other researches – 'considering and comparing various lists of Templar Grand Masters.' Lincoln, Leigh and Baigent continue:

> We consulted all writers on the Order, in English, French and German, and then checked their sources as well. We examined the chronicles of the time . . . . We consulted all the charters we could find . . . . As a result of this exhaustive inquiry, it became apparent that the list in the *Dossiers secrets* was more accurate than any other . . . .

The conclusion of the authors of *The hòy blood and the Holy Grail*, having in effect compiled this list after (at most) several months' work was:

> Granted, such a list might perhaps have been compiled by an extremely careful researcher, but *the task would have been monumental* [my italics]. It seemed much more likely to us that a list of such accuracy attested to some repository of privileged or inside information – *information hitherto inaccessible to historians* [my italics again].

The third list claimed to be of the successive Grand Masters of the Prieuré de Sion, a succession that reached directly into the 20th century and included more than a few unexpected names:

Jean de Gisors	1188-1220
Marie de Saint-Clair	1220-66
Guillaume de Gisors	1266–1307
Edouard de Bar	1307-36
Jeanne de Bar	1336-51
Jean de Saint-Clair	1351-66
Blanche d'Evreux	1366-98
Nicolas Flamel	1398-1418
René d'Anjou	1418-80
Iolande de Bar	1480-83
Sandro Filipepi (Botticelli)	1483-1510
Léonard de Vinci	1510-19
Connétable de Bourbon	1519-27
Ferdinand de Gonzague	1527-75
Louis de Nevers	1575-95
Robert Fludd	1595-1637
J. Valentin Andrea	1637-54
Robert Boyle	1654-91
Isaac Newton	1691-1727
Charles Radclyffe	1727-46
Charles de Lorraine	1746-80
Maximilien de Lorraine	1780-1801
Charles Nodier	1801-44
Victor Hugo	1844-85
Claude Debussy	1885-1918
Jean Cocteau	1918-

There is no space here to consider the names on the list in detail. Lincoln, Leigh and Baigent write:

> The Prieuré de Sion would seem to be both modest and realistic. It does not claim to have functioned under the auspices of unqualified geniuses, superhuman 'masters', illumined 'initiates', saints, sages or immortals. On the contrary, it acknowledges its Grand Masters to have been fallible human beings, a representative cross-section of humanity – a few geniuses, a few notables, a few 'average specimens', a few nonentities, even a few fools. Why, we could not but wonder, would a forged or fabricated list include such a spectrum?

This is more than a little naïve on the authors' part. Few of the names are less than illustrious: even Charles Nodier, who is unlikely to be familiar to any English reader, was a prolific author, a Master Mason, and an active influence in the French Revolution; and Charles Radclyffe was the illegitimate grandson of Charles II.

As for the others: Nicolas Flamel is France's most famous alchemist, and Robert Fludd an eminent English writer on every aspect of the 'Hermetic tradition'; René d'Anjou's name is associated with the 'conspiracy' surrounding Joan of Arc; J. Valentin Andrea was responsible for creating the myth of the Rosicrucians. Many of the remaining names on the list belong to high-ranking – if obscure – European nobles. Therefore it is quite obvious that any ingenious person who set out to forge or fabricate such a list would, with a dictionary of dates to hand, find the task a simple one.

And who, following the death of Jean Cocteau in 1963, is the present Grand Master of the Prieuré de Sion? All the clues point to a modest Frenchman, Pierre Plantard, now known as Pierre Plantard de Saint-Clair (see page 2450). He was apparently described to author Frank Marie as:

Top: Leonardo da Vinci, one of the most illustrious of the alleged Grand Masters of the Prieuré de Sion, who apparently ruled the society from 1510 to 1519

Above: Robert Fludd, the English physician and mystical philosopher, who was allegedly Grand Master of the Prieuré de Sion from 1595 to 1637. In 1602 Fludd was appointed tutor to Charles, Duke of Guise – who later acquired the site, near Rennes-le-Château, of the tomb that appears in an enigmatic painting by Poussin

> a very secret man who did not like one to inquire into his affairs. He lived in a little room on the sixth floor of 35 avenue – in the 16th arrondissement of Paris. It was hardly comfortable: a table, a bed, some chairs, very little furniture . . . . He left these lodgings in January 1973, forgetting to pay an important portion of his rent. His wife Annie Hisler died in 1971 . . . . It seems he was frequently visited by, and put up for the night, M. Philippe de Chérisey, who was *interdit de séjour* (forbidden to stay) in Paris . . . .

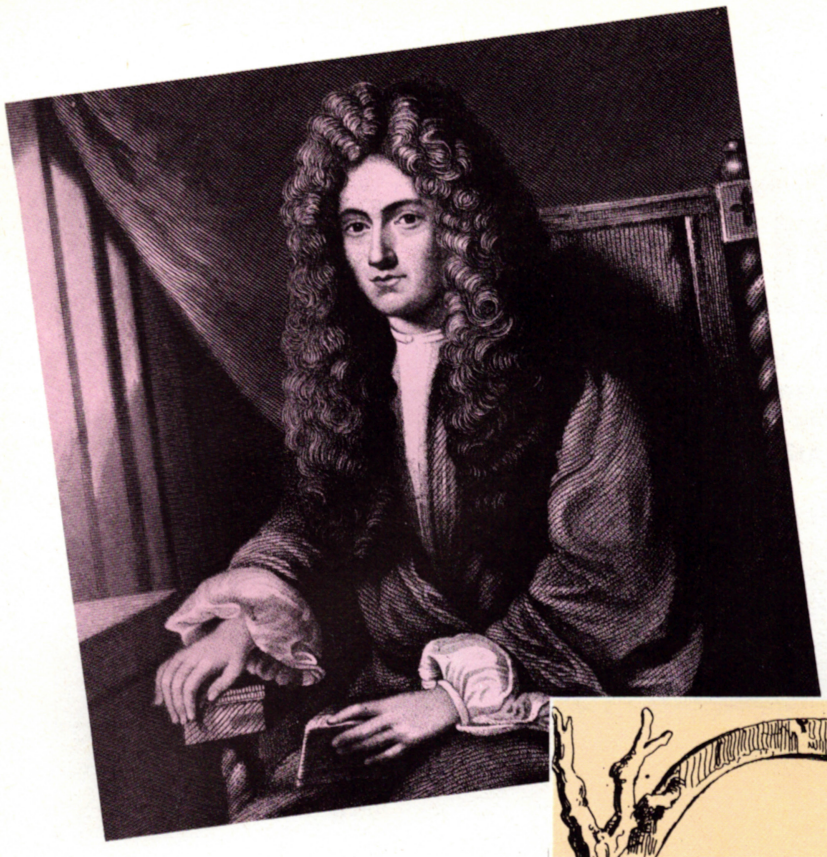
And so we meet Philippe de Chérisey, apparently Pierre Plantard's collaborator and spokesman. He is described by Jean-Luc Chaumeil in the following words:

> Born of a prominent family in the Ardennes . . . Philippe de Chérisey carries his 35 years well, with the lively eye and gentle regard of a poet. First of all a journalist for Belgian TV, he veered later to the theatre . . . and then to the cinema, making films with Bourvil, Zavata and Francis Blanche. He is responsible for several works: *Grégoire et Amédée* (1961), *Circuit* (1969) and several publications on 'l'affaire de Rennes-le-Château' (1976 and 1978).

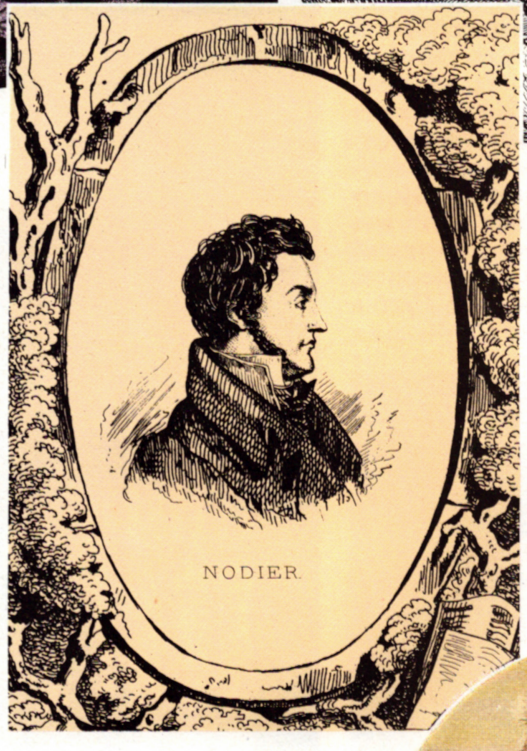
The novella entitled *Circuit* is of particular interest. It takes its title, obviously, from the same source that gave the name to the pamphlets published at various times between 1956 and 1959 by Pierre Plantard – and its name is said to be an acronym for the Chevalerie d'Institutions et Règles Catholiques, d'Union Indépendante et Traditionaliste ('Chivalry of Catholic Institutions and Rules of the Independent and Traditionalist Union'). And the plot of the story concerns an extraordinary adventure underground in the vicinity of Rennes-le-Château, during which the hero discovers the tomb of an ancient Roman and an inaccessible treasure of solid gold.

So we come back once again to Rennes. According to Jean-Luc Chaumeil, in *Le trésor du triangle d'or* ('The treasure of the golden triangle'), Rennes forms one point of a 'mystic triangle' drawn upon the face of France, the other two points of which are situated at Gisors (ancient castle of the Templars) and Stenay (where Dagobert II met his untimely end). There is, however, one great objection to the apparent significance of this statement: *all* triangles have three points – and there is nothing the least remarkable about this particular triangle. It is irregular in shape, each side and each angle being different, so that hundreds of thousands of similar triangles could be drawn, with other, unrelated, towns at their three points, none of them any less – or more – significant.

The Rennes story became public knowledge in France in 1967 with the publication of Gérard de Sède's *L'or de Rennes* ('The



Above left: the Irish-born scientist Robert Boyle, Grand Master of the Prieuré de Sion from 1654 to 1691. It is said that Boyle taught the secrets of alchemy to the great English scientist Isaac Newton, who was allegedly Grand Master from 1691 to 1727. Newton was followed by the Jacobite sympathiser and activist Charles Radclyffe, Earl of Derwentwater (above), who supposedly ruled the Prieuré from 1727 to 1746



Above: Charles Nodier, a prolific French writer who played an active part in the French Revolution, allegedly became Grand Master in 1801. He was succeeded in 1844 by his more illustrious colleague Victor Hugo (right). On Hugo's death in 1885 the title passed to the composer Claude Debussy

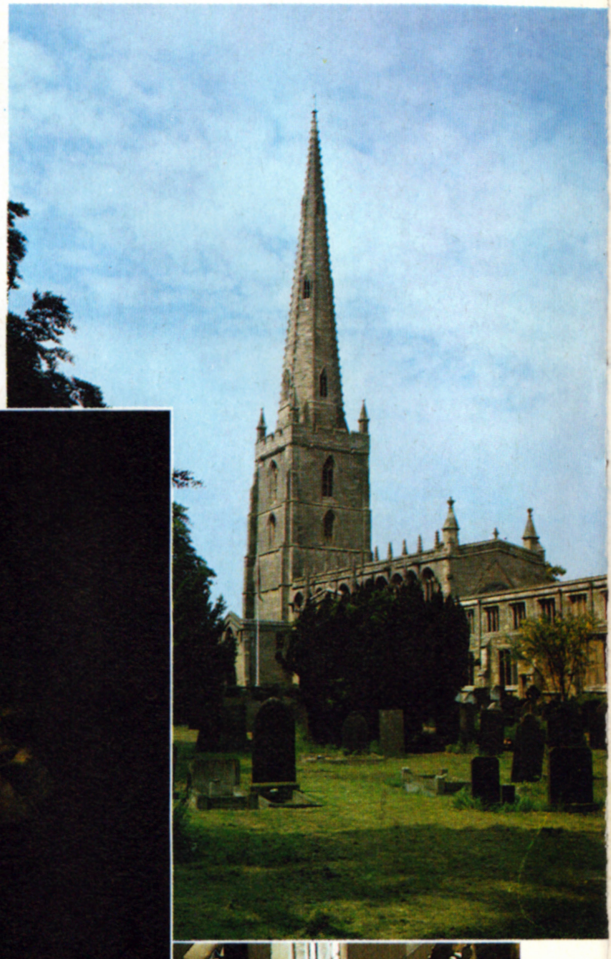
gold of Rennes'). This represented the culmination of a remarkable series of depositions in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Briefly summarising the depositions in chronological order (see page 2494): first, in August 1965, came *Les descendants Mérovingiens ou l'énigme du Razès Wisigoth*; then, in May of the following year, *Un trésor Mérovingien à Rennes-le-Château*. This was followed the next month by an alleged reprint of Stublein's *Pierres gravées du Languedoc*. In March 1967 *Le serpent rouge* received its *Dépôt légal*, followed in April by *Les dossiers secrets*, attributed to Henri Lobineau. Then, in October 1967, came *Au pays de la reine blanche* and, in November, *Trésor au pays de la reine blanche*.

What do we really know of Rennes-le-Château? Pierre Plantard claims it as the home of his otherwise undocumented female ancestor, Gisèlle, daughter of the Count of Razès (see page 2452). Philippe de Chérisey, a friend of Plantard but apparently otherwise unconnected with the region, suggests that there is a buried treasure there. And the authors of *The holy blood and the Holy Grail* have pointed out that the first mention of this treasure in *Un trésor Mérovingien à Rennes-le-Château* is 'a verbatim text, reset and reprinted, of a chapter in a popular paperback – a facile bestseller, available at newsstands for a few francs, on lost treasures throughout the world.' It is time to look once again at everything that has been published since 1967 about Rennes, to try to sift the known facts from the mass of allegation and supposition that surrounds them.

We investigate the facts that lie behind the mystery of Rennes: see page 2558

The flower and the skull

Did the three women of the Flower family kill the Earl of Rutland's sons through witchcraft in the early 17th century? Or were they themselves victims – of an hysterical witch-hunt? FREDERICK GOODMAN investigates



IN THE church of St Mary the Virgin, at Bottesford in Leicestershire, there is a tomb that is unique in English art. It is called the 'witchcraft tomb', and is the only English memorial whose inscription claims that the deceased died through witchcraft. The tomb is that of the sixth Earl of Rutland, who died in 1632. The marble monument consists of three life-sized recumbent images, raised on tiers. The topmost effigy is that of Lady Frances, who became the wife of the sixth Earl in 1604, and who bore him a daughter. The centre effigy is that of the Earl himself, wearing the court dress appropriate to his rank and the Order of the Garter. At his feet is the family crest of a peacock with spread tail. The effigy on the lowest of these three shelves is that of his second wife Cecilia Hungerford, whom he married shortly after the death of his first wife, in 1608. At the head of the group, kneeling in prayer, is the effigy of his daughter Katherine, who eventually became the Duchess of Buckingham. At their feet are two effigies of the sons born to him of the Countess Cecilia.

Above the group there is a long – and somewhat pompous – inscription, almost certainly written by the Earl himself, who designed the tomb. This mainly records his travels and honours accorded him on the Continent. But it is this inscription that makes the tomb unique, for it records: IN 1608 HE MARRIED THE LADY CECILIA HUNGERF'RD, DAUGHTER TO THE HON'BLE KNIGHT SIR JOHN TUFTON, BY WHOM HE HAD TWO SONNES, BOTH WHICH DYED IN THEIR INFANCY BY WICKED PRACTICE AND SORCERYE.

The effigies of the two sons hold skulls: the elder, Henry, holds a skull in his left hand while the younger, Francis, holds a skull in his right hand. But the symbolical flower that Francis holds in his left hand is a direct reference to the supposed manner of his death, for the surname of the witches who were supposed to have caused it was *Flower*.

The Flower family – a mother and two daughters – worked in the home of the sixth Earl, Belvoir Castle. Joan Flower was a kind of general charwoman but her daughters Philippa and Margaret lived in the castle, the latter looking after the poultry and attending to the laundry. Both servants gained bad

Below: the effigy in Bottesford Church of the sixth Earl of Rutland, who died in 1632 of natural causes. But his sons, Henry (far left) and Francis (below right), were believed to have been cursed to death by the women of the Flower family. Both effigies of the sons hold skulls, but that of Francis also holds a flower – commonly thought to be a direct reference to the name of the alleged witches

Above left: the picturesque church at Bottesford in Leicestershire, which houses the only known 'witchcraft tomb' in England (left). The family tomb of the sixth Earl of Rutland is unique in that its inscription openly ascribes the deaths of his two sons to 'wicked practice and sorcerye'

reputations, and Margaret was dismissed – although, it seems, in a kindly manner.

Shortly afterwards the elder son of the Earl, Henry, Lord Roos, fell sick and, after a lingering illness, died, to be buried in Bottesford Church in September 1613. Local suspicion insisted that he had died from witchcraft; the three Flower women, who had (as most people imagined) some reason for damaging the Earl and his wife – and who had already a reputation for being witches – were arrested in 1617, long after the death of the child, and were brought before local magistrates, who included Samuel Flemming, rector of Bottesford. These gentlemen passed the women on to further examination before justices at Lincoln jail.

Joan Flower never reached Lincoln, for she died in mysterious circumstances on her way to trial. Accounts vary, but some insist that she asked for bread, ate it and choked. This account corresponds in essence to popular traditions: it was widely believed that witches could not eat bread. The superstition was linked with the idea of the sacramental quality of bread: a witch – possessed by demons or by the Devil himself – could not take Christ, in sacramental form, into his or her being.

Another account tells the story as though Joan herself were attempting to prove her innocence, and called down upon her the wrath of God:

> But Joan Flower . . . before her conviction (as they say), called for bread and butter, and wished it might never go through her, if she were guilty of that whereupon she was examined; so, mumbling it in her mouth, never spake more words after; but fell down and died . . . with a horrible excruciation of soul and body . . . .

Margaret confessed on 22 January 1618, during an examination before Sir Henry Hobbert, the Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, and local dignitary Sir Edward Bromley. She and her sister claimed that they had cast the death spell and had bewitched the elder child, his brother and his sister. Further, they had cast spells that the Countess might bear no more children. All this they had done because they were angry at being dismissed from service at the castle. The story they told was full of the traditional imagery of witchcraft. Margaret described how they had cast the death spell by using a glove stolen from young Henry. Her mother had stroked her 'familiar' – a cat – with the glove, dipped it in hot water, and pierced it with scissors. This, they insisted, had brought the child to his death. Two years later another glove had been misused in this way, and Francis was similarly bewitched. They had confessed, and both Margaret and Philippa Flower were found guilty. They were hanged at Lincoln on 12 March 1618.

A survivor of the curse?

If the records are to be believed, the second child did not die until all three witches were themselves dead. He survived until 7 March 1619, and was buried in St Nicholas Chapel, Westminster, at the time when the sixth Earl was attending the King. But popular accounts insist that the two children died at more or less the same time – one of the guidebooks to Bottesford Church even repeats this version of the story – perhaps because of the ambiguity of the inscription on the witchcraft tomb.

We may be sure that when the sixth Earl was writing his own epitaph, he himself

believed that his children had been 'hexed' – or cursed – to death. He, the villagers who had the three women arrested, the examining magistrates, and presumably also the judges at Lincoln, sincerely believed that the women were witches. Such was the superstition of the time.

One may today wonder not so much whether they were witches, as whether they actually believed themselves to be witches. The strength of the legal argument, such as it was, rested upon their own admission of guilt. The women 'confessed', as the inscription on the tomb records. This might lead one to suppose that they confessed freely, for it is generally believed that under English law torture was not permitted.

Torture was, indeed, forbidden by English common law. But there are all too many cases recorded where this law was deliberately ignored. Direct torture was often applied – it may have been unofficial, but it was certainly effective.

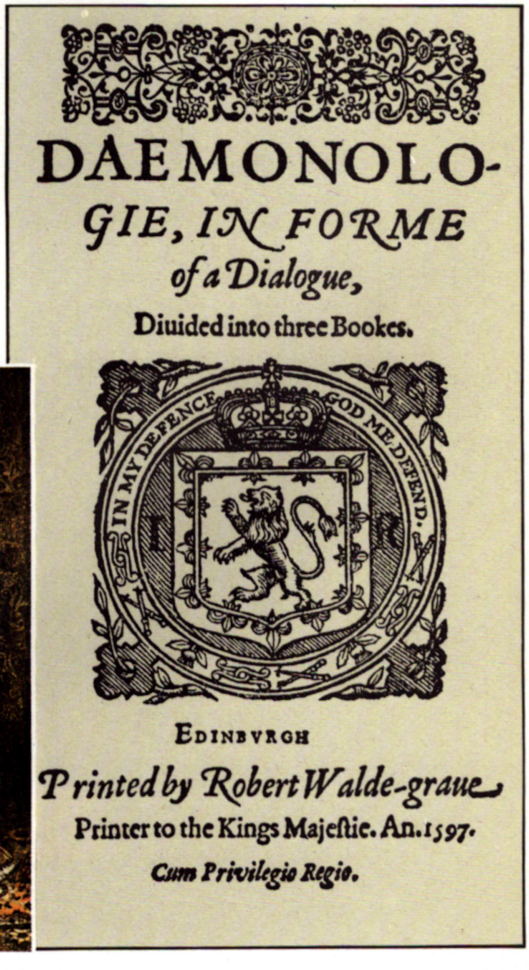
While the majority of those accused of witchcraft denied their confessions – apparently made under duress – and pleaded not guilty, they had neither counsel to defend them nor any legal advice. And since there was no legal requirement for evidence, almost anything could be admitted in court. For example, since it was widely believed that witches had familiar spirits that masqueraded as pets, any old woman who kept a cat or a dog, and who was disliked in the neighbourhood, was in danger of being arrested as a witch. Margaret Flower, when examined in January 1618, confessed to the heinous crime of owning a cat called Rutterkin, 'who would whine, and cry "mew".'

The Bottesford witches became more than merely a forgotten footnote in history. One authority tells us that King James I, who was a friend of the sixth Earl, 'was loth to believe that there were witches; but that which happened to my Lord Francis of Rutland's children convinced him.' This is sheer nonsense, for when the Scottish James VI began his reign in England as James I in 1603, he was already a firm believer in witchcraft, and indeed brought out a new edition of his influential *Demonology* in London during his year of accession.

The Flower case seems to be exceptionally curious, for the two daughters were hanged for murder, yet it was their mother who was supposed to have actually enacted the spell. Again, one of the children whom they are reputed to have killed by witchcraft died only after they had paid the supreme penalty. As the historian of Belvoir Castle points out, 'The principle charge against them . . . was, their having a cat called Rutterkin; the supposed diabolical agent of their machinations.' In the light of modern understanding, it is apparent that the three women were not witches. They died like many other innocents of the time as sacrifice to superstition. And the perpetuation of their name was due partly to the publication of a pamphlet in the year of their death (a fairly standard practice for notorious executions), a document that is a sop to the anti-witchcraft fervour of King James's reign.

But despite the direct reference to 'sorcerye' on the tomb, there is an ironical footnote: the flower clutched in the hand of the younger son has a double symbolism. Although an obvious pointer to the alleged witches of the Flower family, it is also a symbol of innocence.

The Earl of Rutland (above, in effigy, with his two wives) was a companion of King James I (below), whose book *Demonology*, published in 1597 (below right), did much to stir up the witch-hunting hysteria for which his reign is notorious. It may well be that the Earl truly believed his sons to have been cursed to death by the Flower family – or the inscription on the tomb may simply have been an oblique way of currying favour with the King


DAEMONOLO-
GIE, IN FORME
of a Dialogue,
Diuided into three Bookes.

IN MY DEFENCE, GOD ME DEFEND.

EDINBVRGH
Printed by Robert Walde-graue
Printer to the Kings Majestie. An. 1597.
Cum Privilegio Regio.

Post script

Your letters to THE UNEXPLAINED

Dear Sir,
Years ago, before I knew very much about the occult or the paranormal, my uncle told me a strange story about his days in the army.

Apparently his unit was stationed near Alexandria in Egypt in the early 1930s. Apart from their duties there was very little to do and all of them, being young and healthy, were naturally restless – except for one, whom I shall call Dixon. From the day they had arrived at the barracks he had suffered from terrible nightmares and spent his sparse free time lying listlessly on his bed, saying over and over again, 'Fancy coming all this way just to die. To die in bloody Egypt!' The other soldiers told him in no uncertain terms that he was getting on their nerves and that if he felt ill he should report to the medical officer. But he said he wasn't ill, adding: 'Well, here I am and here I'll stay.'

A short while after this, he packed up his few personal belongings, addressing the parcel to his mother, while the other soldiers – who by then gave him a wide berth – felt too nervous about him to be bothered to mock. That night he died.

Naturally it was assumed that Dixon had committed suicide – but apparently he had died from the sting of a scorpion.

The story does not end there, however. A couple of months after Dixon's funeral, one soldier awoke to hear heavy sighing coming from Dixon's bed, which had remained empty since his death. Then a muttering became distinguishable: 'Well, here I am and here I'll stay.'

The soldier lay awake in the dark, paralysed with fear, the hair at the back of his neck prickling. 'Dixon . . .?' he whispered. For a few more seconds the sighing and muttering continued then Dixon's voice said softly but distinctly, 'There is a scorpion on your bed.' Suddenly galvanised into action the soldier jumped out of bed and lit a match. Sure enough, there on his blanket was the largest and most evil-looking scorpion he had ever seen.

Dixon's ghost did not return for some months. By then a fresh unit of soldiers – who had not heard the story – was warned, twice, by his ghostly voice about scorpions that were about to sting them.

In time the British Army left that area and presumably the barrack huts are derelict ruins, half covered in sand. But I wonder if Dixon keeps that tiny part of the desert free of scorpions still?
Yours faithfully,
Digby Pooley London

Dear Sir,
When about to feed my three cats one night, I noticed that two were inside the house and one – a grey-black kitten – was somewhere outside. I went outside to feed it but inadvertently trod on it as it was trying to climb the steps. It died instantly. I could not have seen it in the dark because of its colour.

I put its carcase out in the garden, ready for burial. A few hours later, after feeding the other two cats, I went to close the door – but it refused to shut completely; there appeared to be a soft, but firm, resistance. I swung the door open again to see what the trouble was and there was the kitten – in the form of an apparition: a little lighter in colour and slightly bigger and more mature. But it was definitely the same kitten. I knew it. And he looked very hostile.

When I shut the door again it closed without hindrance and when I opened it again the kitten had gone. I have often pondered the incident since: was his larger size, and maturer appearance, the way he would have looked had he lived? If this is so, then the same sort of reasoning might be applied to the apparitions so often seen of humans – we might be seeing, as it were, a package of *potential*. Perhaps the apparition of an adult may be in fact the apparition of a child who had died recently?

Perhaps some other readers of *The Unexplained* could throw some light on this. I also wonder if anyone has ever seen the apparition of a young child or a baby?
Yours faithfully,
T. Black Hemmant, Australia

Dear Sir,
In the series entitled 'Fairies, demons and aliens' by Hilary Evans (page 2212) you mention an intelligent, middle-aged woman who described seeing a 'cigar-shaped UFO with windows through which she could see silver-suited occupants' – but add that the investigators had proved beyond doubt that she had seen the planet Venus.

No doubt she had; so have most of us – often enough to know that it is not cigar-shaped; it appears merely as a bright dot in the sky, and is far too small for an earthly observer to discern 'windows' or 'occupants'.

Why is the planet Venus so often made into a scapegoat to explain away UFO sightings? Living near London Airport I can well understand how lights on landing aircraft might be mistaken for UFOs – but the planet Venus? Hardly!
Yours faithfully,
Heather Vineham London

Dear Sir,
I was interested in your article entitled 'Aliens within' (page 2086 of *The Unexplained*). The same day that I read it I watched the television programme *Horizon* on BBC 2 (11 October 1982), which showed the conception of a baby in amazing detail.

It occurred to me that there were a couple of other points worth mentioning with reference to your article. The egg starts to rotate in an anti-clockwise direction when the sperm are at the point of attempting entry. And 'flying saucers' are usually portrayed as rotating (in which direction, I wonder?). I also believe that UFOs are said to emit a throbbing sound – like that of a mother's heartbeat?

I would be interested to know if any other readers have similar theories.
Yours faithfully,
V. Orringe Eastbourne, West Sussex

Send *your* letters to THE UNEXPLAINED, Orbis House, 20–22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

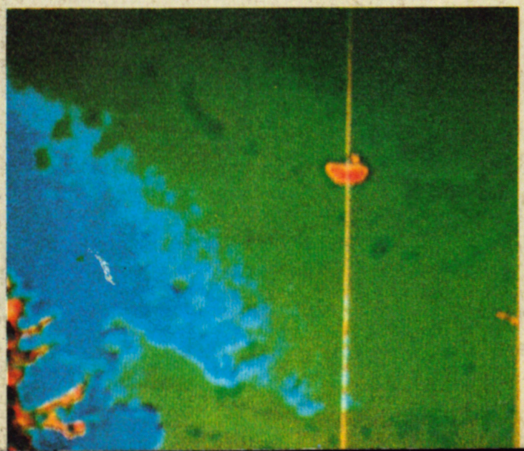
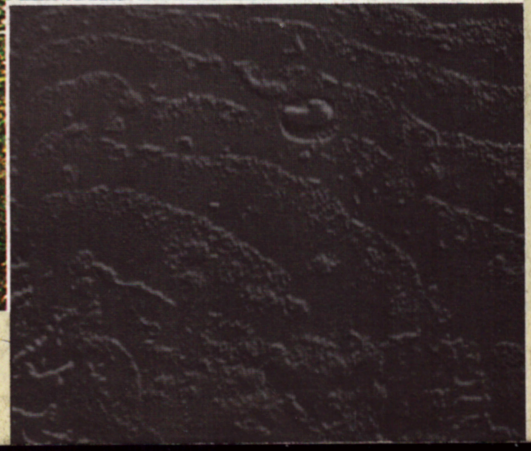
Left: the photographer claimed he snapped this UFO as it hovered over north-west London. But, GSW state, the blurring of the image shows the object is close to the camera. The illuminated 'windows' could have been produced by a built-in light or by a camera flash reflected from a strip of foil

Below: when the edges in the picture are enhanced, there are suggestions of a possible supportive device above the object. GSW's verdict: 'no evidence remotely to suggest . . . an extraordinary flying craft'

Close-up on UFOs

We continue our report on the computer analysis of pictures from our files. These two photographs, allegedly of UFOs, were studied in the United States by the independent research group Ground Saucer Watch

Right: Mr W.N. Henry took this picture in Italy in August 1978 (see page 1489). He did not notice the object at the time

Below: 'colour contouring' gives each area of the picture a 'false' colour, according to its degree of lightness or darkness. It reveals that, *if* the image represents a real object, the lower surface is flat. But the 'shadows' on the object are not consistent with those on the ground

Below right: the edge-enhanced image. Analysis reveals that, if the object is real, it is probably close to the camera. But the image is probably a film blemish